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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 000054

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SUBJECT: PALACE INSIDER SET TO FORM NEW PARTY

Classified by Political Counselor Craig Karp for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Chair and top royal confidante Fouad Ali Al-Himma appears to be taking steps to form a new political party. It would be well placed to dominate Morocco's political scene. A January 17 communique signed by Al-Himma and a diverse and influential group of political elites announced the formation of an "All Democrats Movement" for Moroccans across the political spectrum. One of Al-Himma's closest associates downplayed speculation that the communique represented a first step toward the formation of a new party, but a pro-Palace paper interpreted it as an almost official announcement of Al-Himma's intentions to do just that. A leader of Morocco's largest leftist party lashed out at Al-Himma's ambitions, telling us they formed a threat to Moroccan democracy. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Fulfilling several months of avid speculation, royal confidante and Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Chairman Fouad Ali Al-Himma has publicly moved toward forming a new political party. A communique issued on January 17, signed by Al-Himma and 10 other members of the progressive establishment close to the Palace, announced the formation of the "All Democrats Movement," a grouping pledged to promote a renewal and consolidation of efforts toward national economic, social and democratic development.

¶3. (SBU) The communique invited Moroccan citizens of all political tendencies and backgrounds to join, provided that they were firmly committed to selfless work "in the national interest." Aujourd'hui Le Maroc, a pro-government paper with links to the Interior Ministry (note: Al Himma served as Deputy Interior Minister until August 2007. End note.), characterized the communique as an all-but-official declaration of Himma's intent to form a political party.

¶4. (SBU) Besides Al-Himma, ten other influential Moroccan public figures signed the communique, including Minister of Agriculture Aziz Akhenouch, a business tycoon close to the Palace, Minister of Education Ahmed Akchichen, Mostafa Bakkoury, the CEO of CDG, a major state-owned bank, Rachid Talbi Alami, a former Economics Minister and currently mayor of Tetouan, former Health Minister (and Sahrawi) Mohammed Sheikh Biadallah, and three human rights activists who had served on the Equity and Reconciliation Commission which investigated abuses during the Hassan II era and awarded compensation to victims.

¶5. (C) Hamid Narjis, the U.S.-educated leader of Al-Himma's 36-seat "Tradition and Modernity" parliamentary group and Vice President of the Chamber of Deputies (who also happens to be Al-Himma's uncle), denied that the communique was a first

step toward forming a party during a January 18 meeting with NEA DAS Patton, MEPI Regional Director, and Emboffs. The All Democrats Movement communique should be seen as an effort to bring all Moroccans, particularly those who abstained from participation in the last elections, into the national debate over development priorities and the best means to advance them, Narjis asserted. Neither the All Democrats' communique nor the Tradition and Modernity bloc should be viewed as a threat to other political parties, but rather as efforts to invigorate political life and bring ordinary citizens into the fold, he maintained.

¶6. (C) During an earlier January 18 meeting with DAS Patton and Emboffs, Driss Lachgar, de-facto leader of the leftist USFP, lashed out at Al-Himma and his perceived intent to form a new "official state party" that would effectively monopolize party politics. "This represents a grave threat to democracy in Morocco and we will resist it with all the means at our disposal," Lachgar exclaimed.

¶7. (C) Comment: Notwithstanding Narjis' protestations, the case is compelling that El-Himma is trying to turn the Tradition and Modernity parliamentary bloc into a major political party. Al-Himma's staking out of a powerful leadership position in parliament, his formation of the disciplined and hyperactive bloc during his first few months in the legislature, the tone of the All Democrats communique, and the way it is being interpreted by pro-Palace media all suggest that Al-Himma's political ambitions, endorsed by the Palace, extend beyond his current role as a parliamentary committee chairman. We predict that Al-Himma and his associates will soon form a new political party, and assess that he would be at the top of any short-list of Prime

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Ministers-in-waiting, if and when PM El-Fassi's fragile coalition collapses. End comment.

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